

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - David McGraw

Kedumba; reckoning and redemption

The paint on the wall, milk white; sterile surroundings the last place to expel one hour of glorious life. Australia's leading specialist in 'achilles tendinopathy' was professionally honest in January 2015 stating; "twenty five years of heel striking has caught up with you mate". Under no circumstances was any form of long running to be considered for twelve months, maybe longer; maybe forever.

The spine to physical and mental well-being, a generous and loyal companion all my adult life was gone. Running would take immediate leave and this separation was unbearable. The agonising shockwave therapy applied to swollen, crimson heels, paled into numbness compared to a future without running.

Like a lost soul, the journey to Kedumba commenced; I just didn't know it yet. Six months passed and finally a physiotherapist who believed, a massage therapist dismayed at a stressed body, a yoga teacher asking for patience and a will to run again, to run on for the rest of a natural life. A final piece of a troublesome puzzle, a teacher lighting the path for an experienced runner with poor form to become a novice with perfect form. Eventually after weeks of anti-gravity treadmills, cruel steel bars stripping fascia and scores of needles into bruised flesh coupled with hour after hour in the gymnasium; it was time.

The first run; an opportunity to run away, to run and forget and to run for life. Emotions were strong, a lost brother dying by his own hands and haunting to this day. A reason to run so deep inside it's only unleashed twenty kilometres and two hours down the trail emerged ever so quickly, straight to the brittle surface. No pain though accompanied these feelings, for years running away from demons, now only a desire to hunt them. Only now a fire raging, an urgency to relive, revisit and remember.

How long does it take to mature as a runner? And then the mighty Blue Mountains started calling.

The heartbeat of running and its rhythm, its magic; would it return to offer another chance? Methodically and religiously, a training schedule followed to the letter, always listening to the trusted few, heeding the warnings and the signals, conservative encouragement, daring to dream and a momentum returned.

The sun was rising, kissing anxious faces, anticipation growing, the start line heaving with expectation. Nerves, almost nausea usually accompany this runner, but not this time, not today. A calm sense of purpose, a complete feeling of belonging and above all a grateful acknowledgment to a second chance accepted, never to be wasted. Running returned in all its magnificence, pure and noble, the unforgiving mile, once lost and now home again.

The heartbeat of this run immediately warm, instantly satisfying and incredibly powerful. The epic landscape, stroking hand across ancient sandstone rocks, drips of waterfall deep within hidden canyons, a momentous travel companion on the trail to Kedumba in the country of the Gundungurra. The miles rolling away like so many before in another place, another time. Long ago runs all over the world with younger feet; now a wiser head and stronger heart.

It was Kedumba all along waiting and welcoming, the passage out of hell, inch by inch and a redemption complete. Leaning into the mighty incline, floating down the golden slopes, dappled light through the skyscraper blue gums, rich calls of the Currwaong from high among the bush lemon, deeper and deeper into the valley. The point where running takes you to a place of transcendence, a barrier you cross to an unreal, untouchable place. Once again and over and over, I speak to the wilderness; 'I run, therefore I am'.

Kedumba and redemption indescribable. A temptation late in the day at the foot of the daunting Furber, an urge to turn around, be lost in the giant valley a little longer.

And so it begins, or does it end, is there ever a finishing line? Until next time when Kedumba take me there again.